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SUBJECT: DART WESTERN IRAQ UPDATE 2 JUNE

SUMMARY

1. DART Field Team West witnessed the smooth start up of the public distribution system in Al Hillah on 2 June with numerous food trucks dropping off and picking up commodities. Public response to the mistaken release of a notorious killer, linked to thousands of victims in the mass graves of Babil, was diffused by the new Human Rights Society of Babil that helped to persuade local residents to remain calm. The DART participated in the daily Governorate Support Team meeting and learned that former Ba'ath government workers would have to renounce their affiliation with the Party and turn in their Ba'ath issued weapons within 24 hours. End Summary.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN AL HILLAH

2. Babil Governorate food and flour agents began the June food distribution on 2 June following scheduled collections of commodities from the main Al Hillah warehouse and grain silo. Coalition security forces were present at the warehouse and assisted with the smooth movement of 36 short-haul trucks entering and exiting the compound throughout the morning and early afternoon. Flour and rice collections were also occurring without incident from the grain silo warehouse, and Australian wheat grain was arriving and discharging at the silo bins. Final total numbers from the silo will be available shortly. All 1,713 Babil agents are expected to arrive in Al Hillah to collect ration commodities during the next 15 days.

3. Collections continued until approximately 15:00 even though Ministry of Trade (MOT) employees normally worked until early evening during pre-war distribution periods. However, workers stated that due to the lack of authorized overtime payments from MOT, they would only work normal hours. As previously reported by the DART, the MOT said the normal overtime payment of 1,000 Iraqi dinars was paid to those workers that stayed and worked on weekends, holidays, and extra hours during distribution periods. To date, this 1,000 dinar overtime payment has yet to be authorized.

4. U.N. World Food Program (WFP) national staff reported that MOT/Baghdad has informed MOT Al Hillah that the following exchanges would occur to assist Al Hillah in covering shortages in certain food commodities: vegetable Oil (800 metric tons (MT) from Basrah); detergent (100 MT from Karbala); detergent (300 MT from An Najaf); and pulses (280 MT from Al Anbar).

5. The MOT also instructed Al Hillah to ship 120 MT of infant formula to Diyala Governorate. Due to the double rations provided by the former regime prior to the war, beneficiaries have only two monthly coupons available for the remainder of the year. These remaining coupons correspond to the months of November and December. Al Hillah food agents have been instructed to accept one-half of the November coupon for the complete June ration, and next month, to accept the second half of the November coupon for the complete July ration. They will repeat the same procedure with the December coupon for August and September.

6. This strategy is designed to allow beneficiaries to double value their remaining November and December coupons to avoid running out of coupons after July. Therefore, the

November coupon will be valid for June and July; the December coupon will be valid for August and September. This should allow MOT additional days to print, properly prepare, and distribute coupons for October, November, and December, as well as for 2004.

17. As a result of the 2 June activities, several public service announcements were prepared for broadcast on Al Hillah television regarding the public distribution system for June. The message will contain information to beneficiaries and agents on the following issues:

-- Confirm that the on-going distribution for full rations has begun as planned;

-- Provide food and flour agents with their schedules for collection;

-- Announce that, unlike the old system, agents need to bring cash to collect their commodities; checks would not be accepted by MOT; and

-- Confirm that the June ration will be the same ration as before the conflict.

PROTECTION ISSUES

18. Mohammed Jawad An-Neifus, who was suspected of involvement in the murder of thousands of Iraqi Shiites in and near Al Hillah, was released from the Bucca Internment facility at Umm Qasr on 18 May. According to a Coalition statement, An-Neifus was detained by Coalition forces near Al Hillah on 26 April and was turned over to Coalition Military Police on 29 April. An officer from the Judge Advocate General's Corps conducted a routine screening of An-Neifus on 18 May, and nothing he said alerted the officer to his true identity. The documents containing evidence of his crimes did not arrive with him in Umm Qasr, so he was then cleared for release. Coalition forces have accepted sole responsibility for An-Neifus' erroneous release and are conducting a thorough investigation to ensure against recurrences. The Coalition is also offering a USD 25,000 reward for information leading to his capture.

19. In conversations with the deputy of the Human Rights Society as well as with local Iraqis, the community is stunned at this revelation. Many do not believe that this release was accidental. Some believe he used bribery in order to buy his release. There is a lot of frustration among Iraqis in Al Hillah at this time; many question the true aims of Coalition forces.

110. A joint statement was prepared by the Lawyers' Union and the Human Rights Society denouncing An-Neifus' release and putting sole responsibility for his recapture on Coalition forces. The deputy of the Human Rights Society also said the community would like to try An-Neifus through the Iraqi courts. A silent demonstration was scheduled for 1 June; however, the Human Rights Society was able to halt the demonstration because of fear of violence.

BABIL WEAPONS COLLECTION

11. All Babil government workers must sign one of two forms denouncing affiliation with the Ba'ath Party before receiving their May salaries, a Civil Affairs officer announced on 2 June at the Babil Governorate Support Team (GST) meeting in which DART participated. One form is for those who never joined the Party; the other for those who had. Ex-Ba'ath government workers who denounce affiliation will be paid, but must forfeit their Ba'ath-issued AK-47 rifle or pistol within 24 hours. Coalition forces will search the houses of those who say they do not have a Ba'ath weapon. Ex-Ba'ath workers who do not denounce and sign the document will not receive their salary and will be fired.

112. Fliers distributed in Al Hillah on 1 June declared a 14-day amnesty period for people who own weapons. Non-Ba'athists can keep their AK-47s and pistols, but must register them. Other weapons are forbidden and must be turned over by the end of the amnesty period.

113. A GST Civil Affairs officer announced the formation of a Babil "city council" to work with the governor. The governor's first attempt to create a city council dissolved on 20 May when residents protested that initial appointments had been stacked with the governor's allies. The GST asked the governor to develop a new city council plan while the GST established a plan of its own. On 4 June, they will meet to merge the plans for a 20-to 30-member council with elected officials. There is no date set for a gubernatorial election.

DART VISIT TO LOCAL AL HILLAH SCHOOL

14. Nearly 100 percent of 1,350 students have returned to the primary school that the DART visited on 2 June on the south side of Al Hillah. The director said 36 windows were broken from bomb reverberations during the war, and that other problems existed, including poor water supply and sanitation (five toilets), crowded classrooms, and no ceiling fans for the hot months. The director said the facility was actually two schools in one: 630 girls attend for three days straight, followed by 715 boys for the next three days. Classrooms hold between 50 and 55 students each.

15. The director said this school was one of the best in the area because high-level Ba'ath Party members lived nearby. The deputy director said he remained at the school during the war with other staff and neighbors to protect the facility from looters. There are 43 teachers, including 35 women. Passersby at the school entrance expressed anger at DART for visiting a school that had received a modicum of Ba'ath largesse. They asked DART to visit other nearby schools that were in worse condition.

AR RUTBAH SCHOOL OPEN DUE TO DART-FUNDED INTERVENTION

16. World Vision International (WVI) completed DART-funded water and sanitation improvements at nine of 12 damaged and looted Ar Rutbah schools, creating a groundswell of enthusiasm to reopen the schools that had been destined to remain closed until the next school year in September. With DART funds secured, WVI was able to obtain private donations to fund additional repairs, such as replacing broken windows, chalkboards, and doors, and painting walls. WVI said the rehabilitation provided a psychological boost to the townspeople who have not only decided to restart classes, but to extend the school year and hold final exams. The town was to forsake the entire year.

JONES